

Sealed and vigilantly guarded was "Drayle's Invention, 1932"—for it was a scientific achievement beyond which man dared not go.

- - -

Rays of the August mid-day sun pouring through the museum's glass roof beat upon the eight soldiers surrounding the central exhibit, which for thirty years has been under constant guard. Even the present sweltering heat failed to lessen the men's careful observation of the visitors who, from time to time, strolled listlessly about the room.

The object of all this solicitude scarcely seemed to require it. A great up-ended rectangle of polished steel some six feet square by ten or a dozen feet in height, standing in the center of Machinery Hall, it suggested nothing sinister or priceless. Two peculiarities, however, marked it as unusual—the concealment of its mechanism and the brevity of its title. For while the remainder of the exhibits located around it varied in the simplicity or complexity of

their design, they were alike in the openness of their construction and detailed explanation of plan and purpose. The great steel box, however, bore merely two words and a date: "Drayle's Invention, 1932."

It was, nevertheless, toward this exhibit that a pleasant appearing white-haired old gentleman and a small boy were slowly walking when a change of guard occurred. The new men took their posts without words while the relieved detail turned down a long corridor that for a moment echoed with the clatter of hobnailed boots on stone. Then all was surprisingly still. Even the boy was impressed into reluctant silence as he viewed the uniformed men, though not for long.

"What's that, what's that, what's that?" he demanded presently with shrill imperiousness. "Grandfather, what's that?" An excited arm indicated the exhibit with its soldier guard.

"If you can keep still long enough," replied the old gentleman patiently, "I'll tell you."

And with due regard for rheumatic limbs he slowly settled himself on a bench and folded his hands over the top of an ebony cane preparatory to answering the youngster's question. His inquisitor, however, was, at the moment, being hauled from beneath a brass railing by the sergeant of the watch.

"You'll have to keep an eye on him, sir," said the man reproachfully. "He was going to try his knife on the wood-work when I caught him."

"Thank you, Sergeant. I'll do my best—but the younger generation, you know."

"Sit still, if possible!" he directed the squirming boy. "If not, we'll start home now."

The non-com took a new post within easy reaching distance of the disturber and attempted to glare impressively.

"Go on, grandfather, tell me. What's D-r-a-y-l-e? What's in the box? Can't they open it? What are the soldiers for? Must they stay here? Why?"

"Drayle," said the old man, breaking through the barrage of questions, "was a close friend of mine a good many years ago."

"How many, grandfather? Fifty? As much as fifty? Did father know him? Is father fifty?"

"Forty; no; yes; no," said the harassed relative; and then with amazing ignorance inquired: "Do you really care to hear or do you just ask questions to exercise your tongue?"

"I want to hear the story, grandpa. Tell me the story. Is it a nice story? Has it got bears in it? Polar bears? I saw a polar bear yesterday. He was white. Are polar bears always white? Tell me the story, grandpa."

The old man turned appealing eyes toward the sergeant. Tacitly a sympathetic understanding was established. The warrior also was a father, and off the field of battle he had known defeat.

"Leave me handle him, sir," he suggested. "I've the like of him at home."

"I'd be very much indebted to you if you would."

Thus encouraged, the soldier produced from an inner pocket and offered one of those childhood sweets known as an "all day sucker."

"See if you can choke yourself on that," he challenged.

The clamor ceased immediately.

"It always works, sir," explained the man of resource. "The missus says as how it'll ruin their indigestions, but I'm all for peace even if I am in the army."

Now that his vocal organs were temporarily plugged, the child waved a demanding arm in the direction of the main exhibit to indicate a desire for the resumption of the narrative. But the ancient was not anxious to disturb so soon the benign and acceptable silence. In fact it was not until he observed the sergeant's look of inquiry that he began once more.

"That box," he said slowly, "is both a monument and a milestone on the road to mankind's progress in mechanical invention. It marks the point beyond which Drayle's contemporaries believed it was unsafe to go: for they felt that inventions such as his would add to the complexities of life, and that if a halt were not made our own machines would ultimately destroy us.

"I did not, still do not, believe it. And I know Drayle's spirit broke when the authorities sealed his last work in that box and released him upon parole to abandon his experiments."

As the speaker sighed in regretful reminiscence, the sergeant glanced at his men. Apparently all was well: the only visible menace lolled within easy arm's reach, swinging his short legs and sucking noisily on his candy. Nevertheless the non-com shifted to a slightly better tactical position as he awaited the continuance of the tale.

"Christopher Drayle," said the elderly gentleman, "was the greatest man I have ever known, as well as

the finest. Forty years or more ago we were close friends. Our homes on Long Island adjoined and I handled most of his legal affairs. He was about forty-five or six then, but already famous.

"His rediscovery of the ancient process of tempering copper had made him one of the wealthiest men in the land and enabled him to devote his time to scientific research. Electricity and chemistry were his specialties, and at the period of which I speak he was deeply engrossed in problems of radio transmission.

"But he had many interests and not infrequently visited our local country club for an afternoon of golf. Sometimes I played around the course with him and afterward, over a drink, we would talk. His favorite topic was the contribution of science to human welfare. And even though I could not always follow him when he grew enthusiastic about some new theory I was always puzzled.

"It was at such a time, when we had been discussing the new and first successful attempt to send moving pictures by radio, that I mentioned the prophecy of

Jackson Gee. Gee was the writer of fantastic, pseudo-scientific tales who had said: 'We shall soon be able to resolve human beings into their constituent elements, transmit them by radio to any desired point and reassemble them at the other end. We shall do this by means of vibrations. We are just beginning to learn that vibrations are the key to the fundamental process of all life.'

"I laughed as I quoted this to Drayle, for it seemed to me the ravings of a lunatic. But Drayle did not smile. 'Jackson Gee,' he said, 'is nearer to the truth than he imagines. We already know the elements that make the human body, and we can put them together in their proper proportions and arrangements: but we have not been able to introduce the vitalizing spark, the key vibrations to start it going. We can reproduce the human machine, but we can not make it move. We can destroy life in the laboratory, and we can prolong it, but so far we have not been able to create it. Yet I tell you in all seriousness that that time will come; that time will come.'



"I was surprised at his earnestness and would have questioned him further. But a boy appeared just then with a message that Drayle was wanted at the telephone.

"Something important, sir," he said. Drayle went off to answer the summons and later he sent word that he had been called away and would not be able to return.

"It was the last I heard from Drayle for months. He shut himself in his laboratory and saw no one but his assistants, Ward of Boston, and Buchannon of Washington. He even slept in the workshop and had his food sent in.

"Ordinarily I would not have been excluded, for I had his confidence to an unusual degree and I had often watched him work. I admired the deft movements of his hands. He had the certain touch and style of a master. But during that period he admitted only his aids.

“Consequently I felt little hope of reaching him one morning when it was necessary to have his signature to some legal documents. Yet the urgency of the case led me to go to his home on the chance that I might be able to get him long enough for the business that concerned us. Luck was with me, for he sent out word that he would see me in a few minutes. I remember seating myself in the office that opened off his laboratory and wondering what was beyond the door that separated us. I had witnessed some incredible performances in the adjoining room.

"At last Drayle came in. He looked worried and careworn. There were new lines in his face and blue half-circles of fatigue beneath his eyes. It was evident that it was long since he had slept. He apologized for having kept me waiting and then, without examining the papers I offered, he signed his name nervously in the proper spaces. When I gathered the sheets together he turned abruptly toward the laboratory, but at the door he paused and smiled.

"Give my respects to Jackson Gee,' he said."

"Who's Jackson Gee? Does father know him? Has he any polar bears? Aren't you going to tell me about that?"

The tidal wave of questions almost overwhelmed the historian and his auditor. But the military, fortunately, was equal to the emergency. With a tactical turn of his hand he thrust the remnant of the lollypop between the chattering jaws and spoke with sharp rapidity.

"Listen," he commanded, "that there, what you got, is a magic candy, and if you go on exposing it to the air after it is once in your mouth it's likely to disappear, just like that." And the speed of the translation was illustrated by a smart snapping of the fingers.

Doubt shone in the juvenile terror's eyes and the earlier generations waited fearfully while skepticism and greed waged their recurrent conflict. For a time it seemed as if the veteran had blundered; but finally greed triumphed and a temporary peace ensued.

"Where was I?" inquired the interrupted narrator when the issue of battle was settled.

"You was talking about Jackson Gee," answered the guardsman in a cautiously low tone.

"So I was, so I was," the old gentleman agreed somewhat vaguely, nodding his head. He gazed at the sergeant with mingled awe and admiration. "I suppose it's quite useless to mention it," he said rather wistfully, "but if you ever get out of the army and should want a job.... You could name your own salary, you know?" The question ended on an appealing note.

Evidently the soldier understood the digression, for he replied in a tone that would brook no dispute. "No, sir, I couldn't consider it."

"I was afraid so," said the other regretfully, and added, with apparent irrelevance, "I have to live with him, you see."

"Tough luck," commiserated the listener.

Reluctantly summoning his thoughts from the pleasant contemplation of what had seemed to offer a new era of peace, the bard turned to his story.

A few hours later," he continued, "I had a telephone call from Drayle's wife, and I realized from the fright in her voice that something dreadful had happened. She asked me to come to the house at once. Chris had been hurt. But she disconnected before I could ask for details. I started immediately and I wondered as I drove what disaster had overtaken him. Anything, it seemed to me, might have befallen in that room of miracles. But I was not prepared to find that Drayle had been shot and wounded.

"The police were before me and already questioning the assailant, Mrs. Farrel, a fiery tempered young Irish-woman. When I entered the room she was repeating half-hysterically her explanation that Drayle had killed her husband in the laboratory that morning.

"'Right before my eyes, I seen it,' she shouted. 'Harry was standing on a sort of platform looking at a big

machine like, and so help me he didn't have a stitch of clothes on, and I started to say something, but all at once there came a terrible sort of screech and a flash like lightnin' kinda, in front of him. Then Harry turns into a sort of thick smoke and I can see right through him like he was a ghost; and then the smoke gets sucked into a big hole in the machine and I know Harry's dead. And here's this man what done it, just a standin' there, grinnin' horrid. So something comes over me all at once and I points Harry's gun at him and pulls the trigger!'

"Even before the woman had finished I recalled what I seen one afternoon in Drayle's laboratory many months before. I had been there for some time watching him when he placed a small tumbler on a work table and asked me if I had ever seen glass shattered by the vibrations of a violin. I told him that I had, but he went through the demonstration as if to satisfy himself. Of course when he drew a bow across the instrument's strings and produced the proper pitch the goblet cracked into pieces exactly as might have been expected. And I wondered why Drayle

concerned himself with so childish an experiment before I noticed that he appeared to have forgotten me completely.

"I endeavored then not to disturb him, and I remember trying to draw myself out of his way and feeling that something momentous was about to take place. Yet actually I believe it would have required a considerable commotion to have distracted his attention, for his ability to concentrate was one of the characteristics of his genius.

"I saw him place another glass on the table and I noticed then that it stood directly in front of a complicated mechanism. At first this gave out a low humming sound, but it soon rose to an unearthly whining shriek. I shrank from it involuntarily and a second later I was amazed at the sight of the glass, seemingly reduced to a thin vapor, being drawn into a funnel-like opening near the top of the device. I was too startled to speak and could only watch as Drayle started the contrivance again. Once more its noise cut through me with physical pain. I cried out. But my

voice was overwhelmed by the terrific din of the mysterious machine.

"Then Drayle strode down the long room to another intricate mass of wire coils and plates and lamps. And I saw a dim glow appear in two of the bulbs and heard a noise like the crackling of paper. Drayle made some adjustments, and presently I observed a peculiar shimmering of the air above a horizontal metal grid. It reminded me of heat waves rising from a summer street, until I saw the vibrations were taking a definite pattern; and that the pattern was that of the glass I had seen dissolved into air. At first the image made me think of a picture formed by a series of horizontal lines close together but broken at various points in such fashion as to create the appearance of a line by the very continuity of the fractures. But as I watched, the plasma became substance. The air ceased to quiver and I was appalled to see Drayle pick up the tumbler and carry it to a scale on which he weighed it with infinite exactness. If he had approached me with it at that moment I would have fled in terror.



"Next, Drayle filled the goblet with some liquid which immediately afterward he measured in a beaker. The result seemed to please him, for he smiled happily. At the same instant he became aware of my presence. He looked surprised and then a trifle disconcerted. I could see that he was embarrassed by the knowledge that I had witnessed so much, and after a second or two he asked my silence. I agreed at once, not only because he requested it but because I couldn't believe the evidence myself. He let me out then and locked the door.

"It was this recollection that made me credit the woman's story. But I was sick with dread, for in spite of my faith in Drayle's genius I feared he had gone mad.

"Mrs. Drayle had listened to Mrs. Farrel's account calmly enough, but I could see the fear in her eyes when she signaled a wish to speak to me alone. I followed her into an adjoining room, leaving Mrs. Farrel with the two policemen and the doctor, who was trying to quiet her.

"As soon as the door closed after us Mrs. Drayle seized my hands.

"'Tim,' she whispered, 'I'm horribly afraid that what the woman says is true. Chris has told me of some wonderful things he was planning to do, but I never expected he would experiment on human beings. Can they send him to prison?'

"Of course I said what I could to comfort her and tried to make my voice sound convincing. At the time the legal aspect of the matter did not worry me so much as the fear that the attack on Drayle might prove fatal. For even if it should develop that he was not dangerously hurt, I imagined that the interruption of the experiment at a critical moment might easily have ruined whatever slim chance there had been of success. For us the nerve-wracking part was that we could do nothing until the surgeon who was attending Drayle could tell us how badly he was injured.

"At last word came that the bullet had only grazed Drayle's head and stunned him, but that he might remain unconscious for some time. Mrs. Drayle went

in and sat at her husband's side, while I returned to the laboratory and found the police greatly bewildered as to whether they ought to arrest Drayle.

"They had discovered in a closet an outfit of men's clothing that Mrs. Farrel identified as her husband's, and, although they saw no other trace of the missing man, they had a desire to lock up somebody as an evidence of their activity. It took considerable persuasion to prevail upon them to withhold their hands. There was no such difficulty about restraining them in the laboratory. They were afraid to touch any apparatus, and they gave the invention a ludicrously wide berth.

"I never knew exactly how long it was that I paced about the lower floor of Drayle's home before the doctor summoned me and announced that the patient wanted me, but that I must be careful not to excite him. I have often wondered how many physicians would have to abandon their profession if they were deprived of that phrase. 'You must not excite the patient.'

"Drayle was already excited when I entered. In fact, he was furious at the doctor's efforts to restrain him. But I realized that my fear for his reason was groundless. His remarks were lucid and forceful as he raged at the interference with his work. As soon as he saw me he appealed for assistance.

"'Make them let me alone. Tim,' he begged, as his wife and the doctor, partly by force and partly by persuasion, endeavored to hold him in bed. 'I must get back to the laboratory. That woman believes that I've killed her husband, and my assistant will think that we've failed.'

"I was about to argue with him when suddenly he managed to thrust the doctor aside and start toward the door. His seriousness impressed me so that I gave him a supporting arm and together we headed down the hall, with Mrs. Drayle and the doctor following anxiously in the rear. The laboratory was deserted and locked when we arrived. The police evidently felt it was too uncanny an atmosphere for a prolonged wait. Drayle opened the door, went directly to his machine, and examined it minutely.

"'Thank the Lord that woman hit only me!' he said, and sank into a chair. Then he asked for some brandy. Mrs. Drayle rushed off and reappeared in a minute with a decanter and glass. Drayle helped himself to a swallow that brought color to his cheeks and new strength to his limbs. Immediately after he turned again to the machine. I dragged up a chair, assisted him into it, and seated myself close by.

"I knew little enough about mechanics, but I was fascinated by the numerous gauges that faced me on the gleaming instrument board. There were dials with needlelike hands that registered various numbers; spots of color appeared in narrow slots close to a solar spectrum: a stream of graph-paper tape flowed slowly beneath a tracing-pen point and carried away a jiggly thin line of purple ink. In a moment Drayle was oblivious of everything but his records. I watched him copy the indicated figures, surround them with formulas, and solve mysterious problems with a slide-rule.

"His calculations covered a large sheet before he had finished. At last he underscored three intricate

combinations of letters and figures and carried the answers to his private radio apparatus. This operated on a wave length far outside the range of all others and insured him against interference. With it he was able to speak at any time with his assistants in Washington or Boston or with both at once. He threw the switch that sent his call into the air. An answer came instantly, and Drayle began to talk to his distant lieutenants.

"We've been interrupted, gentlemen," he said, "but I think we may continue now. We'll reassemble in the Boston laboratory. Have you arranged the elements? The coefficients are...." And he gave a succession of decimals.

"A voice replied that all was ready. Drayle said 'Excellent,' went back to his invention and twisted a black knob on the board before him.

"With this trifling movement all hell seemed to crash about us. The ghastly cacophony that I had experienced in the same room some months previously was as nothing. These stupendous waves of

sound pounded us until it seemed as if we must disintegrate beneath them. Wails and screams engulfed us. Mrs. Drayle dropped to her knees beside her husband. The doctor seized my arm and I saw the knuckles of his hand turn white with the pressure of his grip, yet I felt nothing but the awful vibrations that drummed like riveting machines upon and through my nerves and body. It was not an attack upon the ears alone; it crashed upon the heart, beat upon the chest so that breathing seemed impossible. My brain throbbed under the terrific pulsations. For a while I imagined the human system could not endure the ordeal and that all of us must be annihilated.

"Except for his slow turning of the dials Drayle was motionless before the machine. Below the bandage about his forehead I could see his features drawn with anxiety. He had wagered a human life to test his theory and I think the enormity of it had not struck him until that moment.

"What I knew and hoped enabled me to imagine what was taking place in the Boston laboratory. I seemed to see man's elementary dust and vapors whirled from

great containers upward into a stratum of shimmering air and gradually assume the outlines of a human form that became first opaque, then solid, and then a sentient being. At the same instant I was conscious that the appalling pandemonium had ceased and that the voice of Drayle's Boston assistant was on the radio.

"Congratulations, Chief! His reassemblage is perfect. There's not a flaw anywhere." "Splendid," Drayle answered. "Bring him here by plane right away; his wife is worried about him."

"Then Drayle turned to me.

"You see," he said, "Jackson Gee was right. We have resolved man into his constituent elements, transmitted his key vibrations by radio, and reassembled him from a supply of identical elements at the other end. And now, if you will assure that woman that her husband is safe, I will get some sleep. You will have the proof before you in less than three hours."



"I can't vouch for the doctor's feelings, but as Drayle left us I was satisfied that everything was as it should be, and that I had just witnessed the greatest scientific achievement of all time. I did not foresee, nor did Drayle, the results of an error or deliberate disobedience on the part of one of his assistants.

"We waited, the doctor and I, for the arrival of the man who, we were convinced, had been transported some three hundred miles in a manner that defied belief. The evidence would come, Drayle had said, in a few hours. Long before they had elapsed we were starting at the sound of every passing motor, for we knew that a plane must land some distance from the house and that the travelers would make the last mile or so by car.

"Mrs. Drayle endeavored to convince the imagined widow that her husband was safe and was returning speedily. Later she rejoined us, full of questions that we answered in a comforting blind faith. The time limit was drawing to a close when the sound of an automobile horn was quickly followed by a sharp knock on the laboratory door. At a sign from Mrs.

Drayle one of the policemen opened it and we saw two men before us. One, a scholarly appearing, bespectacled youth, I recognized as Drayle's Boston assistant, Ward; the other, a rather burly individual, was a stranger to me. But there was no doubt he was the man we awaited so eagerly, for Mrs. Farrel screamed 'Harry! Harry!' and sped across the room towards him.

"At first she ran her fingers rather timidly over his face, and then pinched his huge shoulders, as if to assure herself of his reality. The sense of touch must have satisfied her, for abruptly she kissed him, flung her arms about him, clung to him, and crooned little endearments. The big man, in turn, patted her cheeks awkwardly and mumbled in a convincingly natural voice, "Sall right, Mary, old kid! There ain't nothin' to it. Yeah! Sure it's me!"

"Then I was conscious of Drayle's presence. A brown silk dressing gown fell shapelessly about his spare frame and smoke from his cigarette rose in a quivering blue-white stream. Ward spied him at the same moment and stepped forward with quick

outstretched hands. I remember the flame of adoring zeal in the youngster's eyes as he tried to speak. At length he managed to stammer some congratulatory phrases while Drayle clapped him affectionately on the back.

"Then Drayle turned to Farrel to ask him how he enjoyed the trip. Farrel grinned and said, 'Fine! It was like a dream, sir! First I'm in one place and then I'm in another and I don't know nothing about how I got there. But I could do with a drink, sir. I ain't used to them airyplanes much.'

"Drayle accepted the hint and suggested that we all celebrate. He gave instructions over a desk telephone and almost immediately a man entered with a small service wagon containing a wide assortment of liquors and glasses. When we had all been served, Ward asked somewhat hesitantly if he might propose a toast. 'To Dr. Drayle, the greatest scientist of all time!'

"We were of course, already somewhat drunk with excitement as we lifted our glasses. But Drayle would not have it.

"Let me amend that," he said. "Let us drink to the future of science."

"Sure!" said Farrel, very promptly. I think he was somewhat uncertain about 'toast,' but he clung hopefully to the word 'drink.'

"We had raised our glasses again when Drayle, who was facing the door, dropped his. It struck the floor with a little crash and the liquor spattered my ankles. Drayle whispered 'Great God!' I saw in the doorway another Farrel. He was grimy, disheveled, his clothing was torn, and his expression ugly; but his identity with 'Harry' was unescapable. For an instant I suspected Drayle of trickery, of perpetrating some fiendishly elaborate hoax. And then I heard Mrs. Farrel scream, heard the newcomer cry, 'Mary,' and saw two men staring at each other in bewilderment.

"The explanation burst upon me with a horrible suddenness. Farrel had been reconstructed in each of Drayle's distant laboratories, and there stood before us two identities each equally authentic, each the legal husband of the woman who, a few hours previously, had imagined herself a widow. The situation was fantastic, nightmarish, unbelievable and undeniable. My head reeled with the fearful possibilities.

"Drayle was the first to recover his poise. He opened a door leading into an adjoining room and motioned for us all to enter. That is, all but the police. He left them wisely with their liquor. 'Finish it,' he advised them. 'You see no one has been killed.'

"They were not quite satisfied, but neither were they certain what they ought to do, and for once displayed common sense by doing nothing. When the door closed after us I saw that Buchannon, the Washington laboratory assistant, was with us. He must have arrived with the second Farrel, although I had not observed him during the confusion attending the former's unexpected appearance. But Drayle had

noted him and now seized his shoulders. 'Explain!' he demanded.

"Buchannon's face went white and he shrank under the clutch of Drayle's fingers. Beyond them I saw the two twinlike men standing beside Mrs. Farrel, surveying each other with incredulous recognition and distaste.

"'Explain!' roared Drayle, and tightened his grasp.

"'I thought you said Washington, Chief.' His voice was not convincing. I didn't believe him, nor did Drayle.

"'You lie!' he raged, and floored the man with his fist.

"In a way I couldn't help feeling sorry for the chap. It must have been a frightful temptation to participate in the experiment and I suppose he had not foreseen the consequences. But I began to have a glimmering of the magnificent possibilities of the invention for purposes far beyond Drayle's intent. For, I asked myself, why, if such a machine could produce two human identities, why not a score, a hundred, a

thousand? The best of the race could be multiplied indefinitely and man could make man at last, literally out of the dust of the earth. The virtue of instantaneous transmission which had been Drayle's aim sank into insignificance beside it. I fancied a race of supermen thus created. And I still believe, Sergeant, that the chance for the world's greatest happiness is sealed within that box you guard. But its first fruits were tragic."

The historian shifted his position on the bench so as to escape the sun that was now reflected dazzlingly by the polished steel casket.

"Drayle did not glance again at his disobedient lieutenant. He was concerned with the problem of the extra man, or, I should say, an extra man, for both were equal. Never before in the history of the world had two men been absolutely identical. They were, of course, one in thought, possessions and rights, physical attributes and appearance. Mrs. Farrel, as they were beginning to realize, was the wife of both. And I have an unworthy suspicion that the red-headed young woman, after she recovered from the shock,

was not entirely displeased. The two men, however, finding that each had an arm about her waist, were regarding each other in a way that foretold trouble. Both spoke at the same time and in the same words.

"Take your hands off my wife!"

"And I think they would have attacked each other then if Drayle hadn't intervened. He said, 'Sit down! All of you!' in so peremptory a voice that we obeyed him.

"Now," he went on, "pay attention to me. I think you realize the situation. The question is, what we shall do about it?" He pointed an accusing finger at the Farrel from Washington. "You were not authorized to exist; properly we should retransmit you, and without reassembling you would simply cease to be."

"The man addressed looked terrified. 'It would be murder!' he protested.

"Would it?" Drayle inquired of me.



"I told him that it could not be proved inasmuch as there would be no *corpus delicti* and hence nothing on which to base a charge.

"But the Washington Farrel seemed to have more than an academic interest in the question and grew obstinate.

"'Nothing doing!' he announced emphatically. 'Here I am and here I stay. I started from this place this morning and now I'm back, and as for that big ape over there I don't know nothing about him—except he'll be dead damn soon if he don't keep away from my wife.'

"The other Drayle-made man leaped up at this, and again I expected violence. But Buchannon flung himself between, and they subsided, muttering.

"'Very well, then,' Drayle continued, when the room was quiet, 'here is another solution. We can, as you realize, duplicate Mrs. Farrel, and I will double your present possessions.'

"This time it was Mrs. Farrel who was dissatisfied. 'You ain't talking to me,' she informed Drayle. 'Me stand naked in front of all them lamps and get turned into smoke? Not me!' A smile spread over her face and her eyes twinkled with deviltry. 'I didn't never think I'd be in one of them triangles like in the movies, and with my own husbands, but seein' I am, I'm all for keeping them both. Then I might know where one of them was some of the time.'

"But neither of the men took to this idea and the problem appeared increasingly complex. I proposed that the survivor be determined by lot, but this suggestion won no support from anyone. Again the two men spoke at the same instant and in the same words. It was like a carefully rehearsed chorus. 'I know my rights, and I ain't going to be gypped out of them!'

"It was at this point that Drayle attempted bribery. He offered fifty thousand dollars to the man who would abandon Mrs. Farrel. But this scheme fell through because both men sought the opportunity and Mrs. Farrel objected volubly.

"So in the end Drayle promised each of them the same amount as a price for silence and left the matter of their relationships to their own settlement.

"I was skeptical of the success of the plan but could offer nothing better. So I drew up a release as legally binding as I knew how to make it in a case without precedent. I remember thinking that if the matter ever came into court the judge would be as much at a loss as I was.

"Our troubles, though, didn't spring from that source. Each of the three parties accepted the arrangement eagerly and Drayle dismissed them with a handshake, a wish for luck and a check for fifty thousand dollars each. It's very nice to be wealthy, you know.

"Afterward, we went out and paid off the police. Perhaps that's stating it too bluntly. I mean that Drayle thanked them for their zealous attention to his interests, regretted that they had been unnecessarily inconvenienced and treated that they would not take amiss a small token of his appreciation of their devotion to duty. Then he shook hands with them both

and I believe I saw a yellow bill transferred on each occasion. At any rate the officers saluted smartly and left.

"Of course I was impatient to question Drayle, but I could see that he was desperately fatigued. So I departed.

"Next morning I found my worst fears exceeded by the events of the night. The three Farrels who had left us in apparently amiable spirits had proceeded to the home of Mrs. and the original Mr. Farrel. There the argument of who was to leave had been resumed. Both men were, of course, of the same mind. Whether both desired to stay or flee I would not presume to say. But an acrimonious dispute led to physical hostilities, and while Mrs. Farrel, according to accounts, cheered them on, they literally fought to the death. Being equally capable, there was naturally, barring interruption, no other possible outcome. I can well believe they employed the same tactics, swung the same blows, and died at the same instant.

"Mrs. Farrel, after carefully retrieving both of her husbands' checks, told a great deal of the story. As might be expected, nobody believed the yarn except our profound federal law makers. They welcomed an opportunity to investigate an outsider for a change and had all of us before a committee.

"Finally the Congress of these United States of America, plus the sagacious Supreme Court, decided that my client wasn't guilty of anything, but that he mustn't do it again. At least that was the gist of it. I recollect that I offered a defense of psycopathic neuroticism.

"As a result of the *obiter dictum* and a resolution by both Houses Assembled Drayle's invention was sealed, dated and placed under guard. That's its history, Sergeant."

The white-haired old gentleman picked up the high silk hat that added a final touch of distinction to his tall figure, and looked about him as if trying to recall something. At last the idea came.

"By the way," he inquired suddenly, "didn't I have an extraordinarily obnoxious grandson with me when I came?"

The attentive auditor was vastly startled. He surveyed the great hall rapidly, but reflected before he answered.

"No, sir—I mean he ain't no more'n average! But I reckon we'd better find him, anyhow."

His glance had satisfied the sergeant that at least the object of his charge was safe and his men still vigilant. "I'll be back in a minute," he informed them. "Don't let nothin' happen."

"Bring us something more'n a breath," pleaded the corporal, disrespectfully.

The sergeant had already set off at a brisk pace with the story teller. For several minutes as they rushed from room to room the hunt was unrewarded.

"I think, sir," said the sergeant, "we'd better look in the natural history division. There is stuffed animals in there that the kids is fond of."

"You're probably right," the patriarch gasped as he struggled to maintain the gait set by the younger man. "I might have known he didn't really want to hear the story."

"They never do," answered the other over his shoulder. "I'll bet that's him down there on the next floor."

The two searchers had emerged upon a wide gallery that commanded a clear view of the main entrance where various specimens of American fauna were mounted in intriguing replicas of their native habitat.

The guard pointed an accusing finger at one of these groups and sprang toward the stairs.

The old gentleman's breath and strength were gone. He could only gaze in the direction that had been indicated by the madly running guard; but he had no

doubts. A small boy was certainly digging vigorously at the head of a specimen of *Ursus Polaris* that the curator had represented in the dramatic pose of killing a seal. A protesting wail arose from below as the young naturalist was withdrawn from his field by a capable hand on the slack of his trousers. And presently, chagrined with failure, the culprit was before his grandsire.

"Gee!" he complained, "I was only looking at the polar bear. Are polar bears always white? Are—"

"You'd better take him away, sir," interrupted the sergeant. "He was trying to pry out one of the bear's eyes with the stick of the lollypop I give him. Take him."

The old gentleman extended both hands. His left found a grip in his grandson's coat collar; his right, partly concealing a government engraving, met the guard's with a clasp of gratitude.

"Sergeant," he remarked in a voice tense with feeling, "a half-hour ago I expressed some ridiculous regrets



that Drayle's invention had been kept from the world. Now I realize its horrid menace. I shudder to think it might have been responsible for two like him!"

The object of disapproval was shaken indicatively.

"Guard the secret well, Sergeant! Guard it well! The world's peace depends upon you!" The old gentleman's words trembled with conviction.

Then alternately shaking his head and his grandson he marched down the hallway, ebony cane tapping angrily upon the stone.

As the exhausted but happy warrior retraced his steps a high-pitched voice floated after him.

"Grandpa, are polar bears *always* white?"